

THE EUGENICS REVIEW

THE MENTAL DEFICIENCY ACT AND ITS ADMINISTRATION.

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IN April, 1914, the Mental Deficiency Act came into operation and after nearly four years it is possible to form some estimate of the value of the measure, of its shortcomings, and of the means available for coping with them.

To all those who remember the Committee stage of the Act, there must remain a vivid recollection of the various opposing forces; the "vested interests" in defectives which nearly wrecked the Bill. The amendments necessitated by the opposition of the Poor Law, the Education Authorities, the defenders of the "liberty of the subject," resulted in the passing of a measure peculiarly complicated, even for an Act of Parliament, and full not only of technical difficulties, but of possibilities of friction between local governing bodies.

Added to these difficulties, which were in a certain measure foreseen, the War has contributed others. The limitations of expenditure by the Treasury, the shortage of staff, medical and clerical, of local authorities, and the almost insuperable obstacles in the way of building, equipping and staffing institutions, have added further complications to a subject already bristling with difficulties. Taking all these circumstances into account it is perhaps not to be wondered at that many local authorities have taken no steps to administer the Act, that others have been deterred by the obstacles thrown in their way, and are only doing as little instead of as much as they can. It is, however, encouraging to find that those active authorities who have been keen not merely to carry out their statutory duties but to deal with the whole problem in their area, have, as

their work developed, become more and more convinced of its urgency and of the supreme importance of carrying it on in war-time. In comparing the work of local authorities now, and, say, at the beginning of 1915, it is instructive and suggestive to note that from the moment an Authority passed for the Statutory Committee a scheme of work which included a detailed consideration of the actual cases of mental deficiency brought to their notice, they have become increasingly impressed with the extent of the problem, the number and conditions of the defectives in their area, and have been thoroughly alive to the national importance of the work they were doing. It is for this reason that even if the action of local authorities is necessarily limited by the present conditions, it is of vital importance that they should even now administer the Act, and be prepared by a fairly complete knowledge of their local needs for the moment when more vigorous action is possible.

The time for collecting information and for preparation is *now*, the time for action must not be delayed for an indefinite period after the war.

To make this article clear it may be as well to recapitulate the chief provisions of the Act on which it is proposed to touch here.

Defectives are divided into four categories ; idiots, imbeciles, feeble-minded and moral imbeciles. In all cases defect must be proved to have existed from birth or from an early age, and medical officers must certify cases as coming within one or other of these definitions. Besides being a defective a person cannot be dealt with under the Act (except at the instance of his parents or guardians, in which case the local authorities have no duty to assist in the maintenance of the defective) unless he is (a) neglected, abandoned, without visible means of support, or cruelly treated, or (b), *i.e.*, brought before a court of law and are liable to be sent to an industrial or reformatory school or prison, or (c), *i.e.*, undergoing detention in an industrial or reformatory school or prison, or (d), *i.e.*, a child between seven and sixteen notified by the local education authority as being unable to benefit by education, *i.e.*, or about to leave a special school and needing institution care, or (e), *i.e.*, a woman in receipt of Poor

Law Relief when giving birth to or pregnant of an illegitimate child.

If a person is defective and comes under one of the above categories, the local authorities can (1) supervise them in their own homes, or (2) present a petition (accompanied by two medical certificates) before a magistrate, who can sign an order sending a defective to a certified institution willing to receive him and which must be named in the order.

The local authorities are statutory committees of the county councils and county borough councils. Their duties are :—

(1) To ascertain defectives subject to be dealt with in their areas.

(2) To provide supervision for defectives living in their own homes, and when supervision affords insufficient protection—

(3) To send them to an institution, or place them under the guardianship of an individual person. Local authorities can either build or provide institutions themselves or in conjunction with other authorities, or make use of institutions run by voluntary societies or managers. The Act provides that half the expenses incurred by the local authorities in carrying out their duties shall be met by a Treasury grant, but the grant is fixed for any one year at £150,000, allocated to each authority on a basis of population. If a local authority exceeds the limit of their grant they may still send defectives to institutions under their permissive powers, but the whole cost falls on the rates, nor have they any *duties* to perform if the expenses of carrying them out is greater than the Treasury Grant.

The Central Authority is the Board of Control, under the Secretary of State. The Board consists of the Lunacy Commissioners in office when the Mental Deficiency Act was passed and of certain additional Commissioners. The Board exercises general supervision over the work for defectives of local authorities, certifies and inspects institutions and homes for defectives, and sees all defectives under certificates. The Commissioners have the power to discharge defectives from institutions. Provision was made in the Act to safeguard the interests of Poor Law and of local education authorities. The local authority

has no duty towards any defective who is under any guardians, unless such defectives are notified by the guardians, nor towards defective children between seven and sixteen, unless, again, such children are notified by the local education authorities.

One of the first problems which the Act revealed, was the difficulty of certification, which is inherent in the question of mental deficiency. As we have seen, a medical officer must certify a defective as coming under one or other of the categories defined in the Act. No hard or fast line can be drawn between the idiot and the imbecile, the imbecile and the feeble-minded, the high grade feeble-minded and the dull, backward or sub-normal individual, nor is it easy to distinguish between the moral imbecile and the immoral, criminal individual of a low mental grade. The condition of the one merges into the other, and particularly amongst the higher grade of feeble-minded, a medical officer may well hesitate to pronounce a person definitely feeble-minded from birth or from an early age, especially when the facts as to early history are hard to secure, the evidence of parents and relations is very badly given, and the defective is only seen at a medical examination under peculiar and abnormal circumstances. This is more especially the case with the moral imbecile; the definition that they must from an early age display some permanent mental defect, coupled with strong, vicious or criminal propensities, on which punishment has had little or no deterrent effect, obviously leaves the ground open to a great variety of opinions. One medical officer will attribute special importance to conduct, to deviations from the normal in a recognition of moral standards, whilst another will seek for signs of mental defect in poor educational attainments. To one medical officer, no one who can read or write, or tell the value of money, can possibly be mentally defective; to another, marked instability of purpose, erratic irresponsible conduct, inability to compete with others will be the determining factors. At any time, with the most complete data obtainable, it is extraordinarily difficult to estimate mental or moral qualities, how much more so when faced with a boy or girl brought up in a bad environment with few chances of learning and with a low standard in their homes.

Experience shows that there has been marked diversity in the standards of certifying officers, even in the area of one local authority, and even greater variation in different areas; in one area the high grade feeble-minded boy or girl of the irresponsible wayward type will be carefully considered and dealt with; in another one the more pronounced case of mental defect (idiots and imbeciles alone) are considered to come within the definitions of the Act.

This difference in standard not only complicates the work of local authorities, but causes endless complaints to be made by outside bodies, societies and organisations, that persons obviously defective in their mental attainments and conduct are not considered certifiable, and that they must be left now as before the passing of the Act, to voluntary organisations to assist.

Whilst recognising the complications that have arisen on this account, it would be folly to close our eyes to the practical difficulties of certification, difficulties which cannot be met by a mere alteration in the wording of definitions, but must wait for their solution till there is a more general knowledge of individual cases of mental deficiency. This knowledge cannot be gained by medical examinations alone; it must be built up on detailed information on a great number of cases covering a term of years; it is only with the actual experience of the troubles, miseries and dangers which beset the ordinary feeble-minded boy or girl, when competing in the outside world, that a just estimate can be formed of what is involved in the term feeble-minded.

One of the first things necessary, therefore, before the definitions of the Act are altered, is a far more widespread knowledge, based on the experience of individual cases of what constitutes mental deficiency. It is not sufficient that medical officers should have the knowledge, but the members of the local authorities and of societies. Individuals notifying cases of alleged defectives should also have a more definite conception of the cases that are likely to be certifiable, and till this general advance in knowledge has been gained, it hardly appears advisable to agitate for wider definitions.

The second great difficulty which arises is that involved in the principle of the Act, that only persons coming within specific categories can be dealt with.

Here the position is extremely complicated. From the administrative point of view the sources of information from which the local authority has to ascertain the defectives, subject to be dealt with in its areas, can be divided into two groups—

(1) In which the local authority itself forms the opinion as to whether defectives are subject to be dealt with.

(2) In which defectives become subject by being notified from an outside source.

The first group comprises defectives who are found to be neglected, abandoned, cruelly treated, without visible means of support; and here again we are faced with absolutely different estimates of the qualifying conditions. For instance, neglected; does this mean criminal and deliberate neglect, or can we read it as constructive neglect, due in a great measure to the mental condition of the defective, which necessitates more care, attention and training, than a normal person under the same condition would require? The decision as to whether there is ground for presenting a petition on the score of "neglect" rests with the local authorities, and they must decide on the reports of the home circumstances and environment of the defective.

Anyone with experience of case work will realise at once how difficult it is to convey (except in extreme instances) anything like a clear picture of home circumstances and environment, especially when this has to be coupled with a full report of the mental and moral characteristics of individual defectives. In practice it has been found that one authority will interpret the word "neglect" in a wide sense, will accept it if it means that parents willing and anxious to do everything for their child are unable to give it the necessary training, or that they are unable to protect the girl or boy from their wayward, uncontrolled or immoral impulses. Other authorities will not accept this interpretation of the word, and only allow "neglect" when such is deliberate or due to carelessness and indifference. They consider the former cases as permissive, and as no Treasury

Grant is available for the cost of their maintenance they refuse to deal with them, and the well-meaning and best-intentioned parents are penalised.

It might be possible to introduce an amendment to the Act making a Treasury Grant available in such cases, but it is even more essential that the local authority should be cognisant of the nature of the problem they are asked to deal with, and should realise the serious results which follow from not protecting defectives before, rather than after, disaster has overtaken them. Such a realisation would do more than any alteration in legislation to secure a more enlightened administration of the Act.

The second group of cases comprises all the defectives where local authorities can only act when notice has been sent to them by public bodies and authorities over whom they exercise little or no control, and where they have only a choice, not so much as to what action, but as to what type of action shall be taken, *i.e.*, whether the defective shall be placed under supervision or guardianship, or sent to an institution.

The defectives coming under this group fall into the following classes :—

(1) Children between seven and sixteen who must be notified by the education authority, as otherwise the local authorities have no duty towards them, thus making them entirely dependent on the local education authority for notice of all defective children of these ages. When the local authority is a county borough the position should be fairly simple, as the Mental Deficiency Committee and the Education Committee are both Committees of the same council, it should not be impossible to secure the systematic and thorough notification of children. Indeed, in many areas (notably those with special schools) this work has been carefully carried out, but in some, official difficulties and lack of co-ordination have resulted in a very small number of children being notified. The greatest difficulty, however, arises with Part III. authorities; there are some 120 local authorities under the Act, and some 361 local education authorities, the greater number being therefore authorities over which the county councils have no control.

It is no exaggeration to say that notification by Part III. authorities has been very inadequate, and that hundreds of children have not been notified at all.

The result of this inaction is disastrous, as defectives who are not notified before sixteen must become "neglected" before they can be dealt with. This, taken in conjunction with the restricted view of neglect held by various Committees, constitutes not only a serious danger to the community, a danger which, it was hoped, the Mental Deficiency Act would remove, but entails much suffering and misery on defectives themselves and on their families.

The whole question of notification by the local education authorities is of primary importance, and sufficient emphasis has not been laid on it, either by the government departments concerned, or by the local authorities and local educational authorities. A very complete scheme for the education and training of mentally defective children should be secured under the Mental Deficiency Act, and the Elementary Education (Defective and Epileptic Children) Acts, 1899 and 1914, if these Acts were energetically administered, and the local authorities were able to provide the schools and institutions needed. Under the latter measure it is the duty of the local education authorities to provide education in special schools or classes, day or residential, for feeble-minded children. Under the Mental Deficiency Act it is their duty to notify to local authorities, idiot, imbecile and moral imbecile children, and the low-grade feeble-minded who cannot receive benefit from education in special schools, or who cannot be educated without detriment to other children, or who on leaving special schools require institutional care. Unfortunately the Act does not provide that children about to leave special schools may be notified for supervision in their own homes. The defective child responds extraordinarily readily to the discipline and ordered life of a special school, moreover, the curriculum is so arranged that no continual strain is thrown on a child. Conditions in the outside world are far different, and over and over again it has been proved that a child who in school promises to be able to make his or her own way in the world is unable to do so after

leaving. Easily led, unbalanced, wayward, uncertain, slow in their work, they too often fail to keep work and drift into bad company and into a life of danger. Such children should be notified for supervision so that the local authorities should have an opportunity of protecting them. This is an important amendment which should not be delayed.

But even as the Act stands, the importance of notification cannot be overestimated. The years seven to sixteen are not only all-important for training if the child is to be either a possible member of the family or to learn to be a happy and useful member of an institution, but they cover some of the more difficult years of adolescence when irregularities of conduct are most likely to occur. Unless, therefore, the local education authorities carry out their duty of notification, the local authority can do nothing to help the defective child until, after sixteen years, they can find him neglected. By that time he has often drifted into bad ways, or has been left altogether without training or proper control. In view of these facts, which are known to all, it seems incredible that more efforts have not been made to secure a complete and thorough notification of defective children by the local education authorities.

(2) Defectives who come before a children's court, or a court of competent jurisdiction, or who are undergoing detention in an industrial school, reformatory or prison. In the former case the defective is brought to the notice of the local authority by the police or the court, and once the defective can be certified as within the meaning of the Act, the local authorities accept responsibility, if accommodation can be found for him in a certified institution.

Again it is obvious that what is needed is a more general and thorough knowledge of mental deficiency; a realisation that there is a class of feeble-minded persons who early drift into a life of petty crime, or are guilty of serious offences against decency. Till such knowledge is common amongst judicial authorities and officials we shall still see as we see now, that numbers of defective criminals going in and out of prisons are not reported, because their mental condition is not soon enough recognised. The momentary difficulties of finding accommoda-

tion for such cases which prevents the local authorities from taking action has a deterrent effect on the notification of new cases.

(3) Defectives under the care of the Poor Law. The local authorities have no duty towards defectives who are being dealt with by the Poor Law Authorities, unless such cases are notified by the guardians. To realise the serious nature of this limitation, it must be borne in mind that the guardians have no power of detention over defectives unless they are of so low a mental grade as to be certifiable under the Lunacy Act. When this is recognised and is taken in conjunction with the fact that a considerable proportion of defectives come from very poor or bad homes, members of degenerate families who tend to drift in and out of workhouses, the seriousness of the situation can be gauged. The Act had certainly intended that defective women giving birth to, or pregnant of an illegitimate child, should be dealt with promptly and efficiently; in practice the very opposite happens. In all cases of defectives under the care of the Poor Law, except those who come under the section just referred to, they must first be proved to be subject to be dealt with, because they have been found to be neglected, or without visible means of support. The Poor Law Guardians have to prove that there are, in addition, special circumstances which make it expedient that they should be dealt with by the local authorities (in other words, that there should be powers of detention), then they report the case to the Local Government Board, the Local Government Board to the Board of Control the Board of Control reports to the local authorities, asking if they are willing to deal with it (practically if they have the institutional accommodation for the defective), and if the answer is in the affirmative, then the Board issues a certificate of exception and the local authorities can present a petition and have the defective sent to an institution. It is difficult to imagine a more cumbersome procedure, or one more likely to defeat its purpose. In all really urgent and dangerous cases (the defectives with immoral or criminal tendencies, with sufficient initiative to take their discharge), long before the certificate can be issued, the defectives have left the

workhouse, and the local authorities, even if they can trace them, can only take action if they can prove neglect, etc. Added to the difficulty of procedure is the further difficulty that it may take some little time for a defective, who is only for a short time in the workhouse, to show signs of mental deficiency, so that it may not be possible for the guardians to take the first move towards notification till the defective is ready or about to take his discharge. Here, again, a more thorough knowledge of the subject would enable Poor Law officials to act sooner, but what is essential, is an amendment of the procedure detailed above; so that it may no longer be possible for urgent cases of defectives, notified by the Poor Law Guardians because they are a danger to themselves and others, to leave the workhouses before the local authorities have time to act. Such an amendment would receive the support both of local authorities and of Poor Law Guardians.

The third great difficulty which has faced the local authorities is that of the shortage of institutional accommodation. The Act was not long enough in force before the beginning of the War to enable the local authorities to build, purchase, or equip any institution, nor was it possible for authorities to know how many or what types of defectives they would have to provide for. In a few towns where special schools were numerous it was possible to form some rough estimate of the numbers of cases to be dealt with, but such knowledge was the exception. By the time the keener authorities had, through ascertainment and notification, some idea of the accommodation that was necessary, Treasury restrictions, the demands of the War Office for hospitals, the practical difficulties in the way of building put an end to any idea of the authorities providing sufficient accommodation for the defectives who urgently needed it. They were obliged either to adapt small existing institutions or homes for one type of defectives, or to use the accommodation provided by charitable societies. A certain number of institutions existed, but the accommodation was very limited; the managers of many institutions were only able to take higher grade cases who were not too troublesome, and as a result, it is now practically impossible to find accommodation for low grade

cases, idiot, imbecile children, epileptic defectives or immoral or criminal boys and men. Some authorities such as Somerset, London, Middlesex, Lancashire, Bradford, Leeds and Sheffield, have provided small institutions for a few of the cases, but on the whole, of the 2,000 defectives sent to institutions by local authorities, the vast majority are in institutions under voluntary committees. In hundreds of cases the local authorities are obliged to say they cannot deal with them because they have no place for them. This re-acts very unfavourably on the work as a whole. Societies and individuals learn that an authority can do nothing in the cases reported to them, and they cease to send in the names of defectives who should undoubtedly come under the Act, and "ascertainment" becomes very inadequate.

It would probably be the unanimous view of all authorities and individuals concerned in the welfare of defectives that the shortage of institution accommodation is the worst stumbling block of the moment, and it undoubtedly is the chief practical difficulty of the present time. It is heartrending work to have case after case brought before an authority where no adequate assistance can be given, because there is no place for the defective in any institution. Unfortunately the difficulty of finding institutions, or of securing places in institutions for defectives, will persist long after the war unless some effort is made at once to amend the financial position of the Act.

The grant of £150,000 was only intended to cover a short period, and already in 1914 amendments were brought before the House to withdraw this limitation, and to make the Treasury grant cover "half the net amount of the cost on income account properly incurred by the Council in performing their duties under the Mental Deficiency Act, 1913." The more active authorities have spent all the money allocated to them, and they must either refuse to send any more defectives away or throw the whole burden on the rates. At the same time, owing to the large number of authorities who have done little or nothing, less than half the £150,000 has been spent. The Treasury do not see their way to allocate the grant on any other basis than that of population, and a complete deadlock has arisen. Unless some alteration can be made in the allocation

of the £150,000, the keen authorities will cease working, and the Mental Deficiency Act will become a dead letter. It will be no use to increase the accommodation available for defectives as the Board of Control are doing by the approval of workhouse premises for defectives under detention orders, and chargeable to the local authorities, if these authorities have no Treasury Grant. The position will be (is, in fact) that authorities who know of urgent cases cannot get a Treasury Grant for their expenses, because the money is, so to speak, "tied up" on authorities, who may not have even taken the trouble to ascertain the defectives within their area. No one is anxious to increase the indebtedness of the nation by reckless spending, on the other hand, in view of the urgency of the problem, it is hard to justify this special "economy." The administration of the Mental Deficiency Act has proved, over and over again, that to allow defectives, who are a danger to others and are unable to protect themselves, at large, is to spend money on them directly or indirectly, through the police, the Courts of Law, the prisons, the workhouses, charitable sources; it is economy to spend it in protecting them in institutions.

In the foregoing pages a brief outline has been given of the chief difficulties discovered in the administration of the Act, and an attempt has been made to show where these can be met by the amendments, and where they will only be solved by the careful and systematic administration of the Act which will give the experience needed to a right understanding of the problem.

After this somewhat gloomy picture of the difficulties in the way of the Act, it is of interest to see what has actually been accomplished by the keen local authorities and to indicate that much can still be done. It may be convenient to divide the duty of local authorities under two separate headings, the investigation into and the care of defectives in their own homes (ascertainment and supervision), and the sending of defectives to institutions.

Authorities who have actively administered the Act have carried out all these duties, but as a whole the work of supervision has been neglected. As it assumes special importance at this moment when the shortage of institutions is so marked,

and when the accommodation that is available must be kept for urgent cases, it is worth considering if, in spite of the fact acknowledged by every one, that supervision is only an adequate method of dealing with defectives in a small number of cases, and is in the vast majority of cases only permissible as a temporary measure, it is not one which should be actively enforced.

In spite of the shortage of medical officers and the staff in county offices, the work of ascertainment and supervision can be carried out even in war-time, it has been done very effectively in some of the most rural counties, where work at the present, owing to difficulties of travelling, is specially complicated.

The procedure has generally been for local authorities to send out notices to police, philanthropic societies and rescue homes, asking them to notify any defectives subject to the Act they may know of. When the name of the defective is received, a visit of investigation is made by an inspector or officer appointed for the purpose. The medical officer pays a visit to the case, which is then reported to the Mental Deficiency Committee. If the medical officer is prepared to certify that the person is a defective the local authority decides whether they are subject to be dealt with (that is in the case of defectives not notified by local educational authorities, etc.), and directs what action shall be taken. In some areas all defectives subject to be dealt with are placed under supervision and the local authority directs the number of visits to be paid. If a case is urgently in need of institutional care the authority directs that a petition be presented when a vacancy can be found in a suitable institution. In really urgent cases the defectives may be sent to a place of safety till the petition can be presented.

Ascertainment and supervision can be carried out either directly by the local authorities, or they can employ any society or institution for the care of the defective to do so. In many cases voluntary associations, for the care of the mentally defective, carry out the work.

In 1913 the Central Association for the care of the Mentally Defective was founded to form a Council on which all the various

public authorities, social organisations, homes and institutions concerned in the care of defectives should be represented. One of the principal objects of the Council is to assist in the formation of local voluntary associations all over the country. Some thirty-eight associations exist at the present time; some of these existed as societies for the care of the feeble-minded, or for the after care of children leaving special schools, long before the C.A.M.D. was formed, but the scope of their work was extended so that all the associations work practically on the same lines. These voluntary associations are generally formed at the instance of the local authority with the local educational authorities. The Poor Law Guardians, besides various societies, institutions, rescue homes, etc., are all represented on the Committee. The association visits defectives in their own homes, whether such defectives are subject to the Act or not. It is generally employed by the local authority to assist in the ascertainment of defectives, to supervise defectives in their own homes, and the secretary acts in many cases as the petitioning officer for the local authority. The association, being in close touch with the various activities named, is able to secure local friendly visitors for defectives, who report immediately the conduct of the defectives gives rise to anxiety, or when circumstances alter, and who are consulted by the friends and relations if trouble arises. One of the most striking results of the work is the almost universal friendly welcome which is given by the friends and relations to the visits of the secretary or the visitors of these associations. Those who have no experience of this kind of work can have no conception of the troubles and sorrows, the shame and misery some families suffer on account of the defectives. They do not like to speak to their neighbours, they do not know how to train or guard the defective, and it is an inestimable boon to them to have someone to turn to for help or advice. The idea was prevalent at first that the visits would be resented, but experience has proved that this is not the case. Care must be taken to choose tactful visitors and to instruct them in the nature of the work. The voluntary associations receive grants from the local authorities and from the Board of Control, and sometimes

from the local education authorities (if they visit feeble-minded children for whom there is no room in the special schools). They visit any defectives they hear of, or any difficult borderline cases who are causing trouble and anxiety to the families, where other societies refuse to help because they fear that the difficulties are caused by mental disturbance. They report to the local authorities those cases which appear to be subject to the Act, and they keep them under supervision (if directed to do so), and make full and detailed reports on the conduct and the circumstances of the defectives, and on the means that exist for their care and protection. For defectives who do not come under the Act, or for those "borderline" cases referred to above, the visitors continue in friendly touch with them, and often are able to assist the family either to send the defective to a training home or to an observation home, or to give them better care and protection.

It has been proved by the experience of the local authorities who employ them, that the voluntary associations are of substantial assistance to them, and that they do save the time and labour of officials. In the year ending December, 1916, some 7,448 defectives were visited or advised or befriended by the associations; of those 1,333 were under supervision. During the same period the local authorities had chargeable to them in institutions about 2,000 cases. As there were no empty places in institutions, and all possible certified accommodation was made use of, it is clear that without the voluntary associations a very small number of defectives would be cared for. When we take into consideration the figures of the Royal Commission, where it is stated that 66,509 defectives were urgently in need of protection, and when we look into the cases notified in any area where active work is carried on, and we see how much more numerous they are than was thought even by the Royal Commission, it is clear that an enormous amount of work remains to be accomplished.

I would, however, emphasise the fact that the first steps to a thorough administration of the Act are ascertainment, notification of children by the local education authorities, and of defectives who are in and out of workhouses by the Poor Law

Guardians, and supervision, so that until institution accommodation can be secured the local authorities may know what is the actual condition of the defectives within their area, and when it is absolutely necessary that adequate means should be taken to protect them.

The problem of institution accommodation must be faced, even in war-time, when the difficulties of building and staffing are almost insurmountable. The Board of Control is approving a considerable number of workhouses for the reception of defectives so that local authorities can send cases under orders to them. This should, if properly made use of, meet the difficulties of dealing with the defectives who are "ins and outs" of workhouses. If the procedure for the notification can be simplified, and they can be detained in the workhouse at the expense of the local authorities, we should have done much to meet one of the gravest dangers to which the State is exposed:—the continual increase of the number of illegitimate children of defective women. It should be possible also to detain the defective boys and men who drift from prison to workhouse and who are as great a danger to the nation as the feeble-minded girls. The workhouse, though not ideal from the lack of training facilities, of workshops, etc., can be used without hardship for these cases, but other provision is also required for defective children and defectives who have never been in a workhouse. It should be strongly impressed on the Government that the provision of institutions for defectives is an urgent measure of social reform, and that it should be duly considered in any schemes of reconstruction.

It is not possible in the scope of one article to deal with more than one or two aspects of this interesting problem, but enough has been said to indicate the general lines on which work for defectives can, in spite of the war, be carried on, and to emphasise once again the importance to the nation of caring efficiently and kindly for the mentally defective. If the work is to develop, no pains must be spared to prove to the indifferent and ignorant that this work has a special importance in war-time, and that it should not be neglected for newer and more attractive forms of social work.